

Blog your boat



Social media can change how you cruise, **Dini Martinez** explores why you might spread your profile.

Many moons ago, long-distance sailing was reserved for the few adventurous souls and true lovers of the ocean who craved nothing more than the romance of an uncluttered horizon. They were sailing the seven seas hoping to catch a glimpse of truth of themselves and the world, reflected in the depth of the sea.

Compared to the times of Dumas and Moitessier, blue water cruising has become mainstream, so to speak. Jimmy Cornell, successful author and renowned organiser of ocean rallies, estimates an

average of 10,000 blue water cruisers out there at any one time. Many of them maintain regular blogs which not only keep family and friends informed, but, arguably have hugely influenced the nature of cruising life itself.

Source of information

It has become much easier to cut the lines, partially due to the vast amount of information and encouragement from like-minded people on the worldwide web.

A quick Google search on blue-water cruising blogs reveals hundreds of entries. Many of those blogs excel themselves in professionalism, readability and information provided, through enlightening articles, photographs or videos.

Wanna-be cruisers can learn about anything from typical life afloat cruising with kids or pets, gear reviews, technical tips and tricks, destination details and more. More so, landlubbers can access cruisers of similar age, cruising approach or wave-length, for detailed questions and encouragement.

For blogging cruisers themselves, it has become much easier to stay in touch, as well as meet other like-minded cruisers and share insider information on cruising destinations. Regular posts keep everyone up-to-date with less time and effort than regular individual emails.

As to new friends, a blog search has made it easy to get in touch and arrange anchorage meeting points with cruisers on the same wavelength: other family boats, same language or nationalities, to particular boat makes and models. From this, virtual friendships can turn real.

Invaluable insider information from blogging cruisers who previously sailed in the area can mean much more than finding out the best pub to go to. Some remote places come without pilot books or even trustworthy charts. In those cases particularly, information from previous cruising visitors and their blogs can be invaluable. But all of this also comes at a price.

Getting away from it all – but not really

Back in the days, part of the beauty of cutting the shore-lines lay in getting away from it all.

While the romantic view of modern day cruising still incorporates that same detachment, today's cruisers often excel one another when it comes to staying connected through social media. Rare are the cruisers who do not have their own blog. Even more common are the ones who additionally tweet, Facebook, Instagram and use other social media at least weekly if not daily and even from the middle of the oceans.

Some cruisers turned bloggers actually spend more time maintaining their blog than their boat.

Are Generation X and Y scared of truly being alone at sea?

Are we wanting to get away from it all, but not daring? Or is the availability of staying connected with the rest of the world at the click of a button simply a positive addition to mitigate the else remoteness of long-distance cruising?

Mitigating loneliness

Sometimes long-term cruising can get quite lonely. While seeing different places and locations almost every day is immensely beautiful, depending on the culture you are cruising in, locals can keep you at arms distance.

Additionally, language barriers can make it hard to connect on a deeper level. Even new friends made along the way will be left behind when the winds blow you on to separate shores.

Silence, loneliness and empty space is something that strongly contrasts the constant bombardment of information, screens and high tech adverts in our modern society. Possibly, some bloggers find a way to feel less lonely through the worldwide connection their blogs provide.

Earning money with social media

A few lucky ones can excuse the timely expense of blogging. Not only by staying connected with the world, but also by earning money through their blogs.

However, this is by far a minority and competition is big. Even the ones who manage to make a few dollars earn peas considering the time and effort spent blogging instead of boating. Successful bloggers need to have more motivation than topping up their boating kitty.

To monetise your blog, one needs a great number of followers and daily view, usually in the five digit area (10,000 daily views and up). This means years of free blogging before the efforts start paying off.

To maintain a well-designed, informative and interesting blog, it can easily take several hours each day. While non-cruisers might think time is easily at hand when sailing, cruisers know that life afloat is not all hammocks and sundowners. The popular saying 'long-term sailing is actually boat maintenance in exotic locations' has surely got a big chunk of truth to it. Add formalities and bureaucracy, admin., provisioning, cooking, exploring places you visit and, for some, kids and schooling, there is not much spare time left in a day.

So why do many still choose to spend their time on a computer, rather than chilling on deck in their hammock?

For those whose answer is money, they earn in different ways. If blog statistics are high enough, you can start charging for advertisements or add links to products which, if purchased by your readers, will get you a percentage of the sales price. Others are supported by private sponsors, followers and patrons to financially support their voyage à la crowd-funding.

Yet others simply receive free gear in exchange for advertising for a company in their posts and on their sites. This alone can mean massive savings as boat gear is never cheap. It can, however, influence the authenticity of a blog as you are no longer free to write without an agenda.

The quest for internet access

Whether blogging for fun, social needs or extra cash, it requires internet. For pictures and videos, it entails a lot of it too, in terms of signal strength for uploads and gigabytes available.

For cruisers turned bloggers, the regular quest for internet can easily influence your cruising plans. If you rely on publicly available internet or cafes too far off from civilisation is not an option.

Even places you visit and bars you choose for a coffee or sundowner will not be selected due to the menu or look and feel, but to its internet availability and signal strength. Sometimes you might even stretch your budget for a night or two in a marina with good connection, which in a non-blogging world would have given way to the next local bay with free anchorage or moorings.

For savvy long-term online-sailors it is less stressful to sort out their own internet aboard. Most often than not this can be a rather costly undertaking and its success can vary from anchorage to anchorage and country to country.

Satellite coverage is widely available, but still very expensive. In some places, buying a mobile sim-card with internet data plan can be easier said than done.

Moreover, some secluded bays do not have mobile phone coverage and might



MAIN: The beauty of being online, you can be anywhere. This is Valletta Harbour, Malta.

RIGHT: Even from a secluded bay in Turkey, you can be in touch if you wish and if you prepare.

ABOVE: What better way for grandparents to keep track of their grandchildren than via a personal yacht blog?



OUR FAVOURITE CRUISING BLOGS

There is no such a thing as best blogs as it always depends on what the reader is looking for.

Here is an all-round selection of sailing blogs including families, big kids, tiny kids, pets, couples, singles, full- and part-time sailors, mono- and multihulls, Australian and others, regular bloggers and occasional ones.

- Sailingtotem.com: a US family of five sailing the world for seven years
- SailingYogaFamily.com: the author's blog, a yogini and her family's nomadic world travels by land and sea

- Logofdelviento.blogspot.de: a family of four sailing the seven seas
- Turftosurf.com: an adventurous lady and her lad travelling the world
- Artofhookie.org: a writer and sailor on low budget
- Sv-takeiteasy.com: an Australian couple with their cat on their cat
- Astrolabesailing.com: an Australian working towards her dream of sailing the world. ETD 2020
- Thenomadtrip.com: a guy and his boat
- Sailingconductors.com: two musicians sailing from Sydney to Germany.

get a miss by the most blog-addicted cruisers for the sake of not skipping a post. The quest for internet access and maintaining a blog can easily turn an otherwise blissful cruising dream into a frustrating, at times fruitless, mission.

For us it was not blogging, but working from the boat which made reliable internet access imperative to making our family's life afloat possible. After testing almost all options, what worked best most of the time was a 12v wi-fi router strength. We additionally installed a dual external antenna which connects directly to the router.

Losing the routes or redefining long distance cruising?

I wonder whether the historic heroes of the sea sometimes turn around in their tombs at the fact of how 'mediarised' modern cruising has become.

I wonder whether our society's issue of internet addiction has simply been taken to the sea. I also wonder whether some vigorous daily bloggers actually get time to enjoy their chosen adventurous way of life, or whether it is more about showing off.

Personally, we started our blog a few months before we left Sydney to commence a nomadic life at sea. Besides keeping family and friends informed on our how and whereabouts, I saw it as a creative outlet for my writing and photography, which I both love.

Whenever time allows, I can write whatever I feel like, from local observations to poems, to answers to the many questions we get from readers. There is no agenda and no time or scale pressure as there is for my articles which makes it all fun.

Two years into blogging and cruising, it has allowed us to get in touch with so many wonderful people we would otherwise never have met.

I open my heart through the blog and people do the same towards us. It gives us real joy being able to help wanna-be cruisers get closer to their dream by responding to their messages and writing real-life, encouraging, yet realistic insights into what cruising life with kids actually looks like.

Moreover, meeting the other cruisers, especially other cruising families who we have gotten in touch with thanks to our blog, has been one of the highlights of our sailing journey. Now that it has come to selling our boat due to unexpected changes in personal circumstances, once again the blog has proven to be extremely useful. This time by getting the word out there to potential buyers and of course, to continue our journal about our land travels for a change.

Summary

For cruisers enjoying the various forms of output social media allows for, blogs can be a fantastic way to boost social life, be creative and maybe even top-up the cruising kitty while long-distance cruising.

For landlubbers, cruising blogs are a great window into a different life out there, more real than most stuff you see on TV.

For those who see screens as a burden and who still truly enjoy the tranquillity of the deep sea far away from everything else, do not worry, there is still plenty of scope to stay away from the world wide web and catch up on the local gossip and discuss cruising plans with the connected cruisers in the next anchorage. 

cruisinghelmsman Dini Martinez



Dini Martinez lives on her Moody 425 with her husband and two little boys. They left settled life in Sydney in July

2013 and are cruising the Med at the moment, slowly making their way back to Australia over the next few years. Updates on their journey and yoga retreats Dini teaches on the way can be found on SailingYogaFamily.com.

